



USDA Foreign Agricultural Service

GAIN Report

Global Agriculture Information Network

Template Version 2.09

Voluntary Report - public distribution

Date: 11/5/2004

GAIN Report Number: IN4120

India

Agricultural Situation

Weekly Highlights & Hot Bites #43

2004

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Report Highlights:

India seeks fifteen years to open up farm sector, *Government hikes wheat support price*, *UNESCO to set up biotech center*, *National biotech policy by January*.

Includes PSD Changes: No
Includes Trade Matrix: No
Unscheduled Report
New Delhi [IN1]
[IN]

Welcome to Hot Bites from India, a weekly summary of issues of interest to the U.S. agricultural community. The report includes information that has been garnered during travel within India, reported in the local media, or offered by host country officials and agricultural analysts. Press articles are included in this report. Significant issues will be expanded upon in subsequent reports from this office.

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INDIA SEEKS FIFTEEN YEARS TO OPEN UP FARM SECTOR

India has sought fifteen years to open up its agriculture sector as part of the ongoing Doha Development Agenda. "It will take us 10-15 years to reform the agriculture sector in terms of infrastructure, value addition and opening up of markets," Commerce Secretary S.N. Menon told a gathering of the International Chamber of Commerce Commission on Trade and Investment organized by the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry and the International Chamber of Commerce India. Mr. Menon also asked developed countries to rationalize their subsidies. India would reduce tariffs on agricultural imports when these countries eliminated or reduced trade-distorting subsidies and export support in the agricultural sector, he said. (Source: Economic Times, 10/30/04)

GOVERNMENT HIKES WHEAT SUPPORT PRICE

The government hiked the minimum support price of wheat for the 2004/05 marketing year (Apr-Mar) by rs. 100 (\$2.20) per metric ton to rs. 6,400 (\$140.7) per metric ton. This is expected to cost the exchequer an additional rs. 2 billion (\$44 million), assuming that the Food Corporation of India and State agencies procure 20 million tons of wheat from the 2004 crop. The government also increased the support price of other *Rabi* (winter season) crops. The revised prices per metric ton are: barley – rs. 5,400 (\$118.7); chickpeas – rs. 14,250 (\$313.2); lentil – rs. 15,250 (\$335.2); rapeseed – rs. 17,000 (\$373.6); and safflower – rs. 15,500 (\$340.7). (Source: Business Line, 11/04/04)

Post Comment: The hike in the support price would make Indian wheat more uncompetitive in the world market.

UNESCO TO SET UP BIOTECH CENTER

The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has decided to set up a center for biotechnology in India. Addressing a press conference, Union Minister for Science and Technology emphasized the need for more international cooperation in science and technology. He also said that India has more than 60 bilateral science and technology cooperation agreements with various countries, and this is a part of India's global diplomacy.

Post Comment: The main focus of the proposed biotechnology center will be human resource development and exchange. As part of the program, personnel from south and southeast Asian countries would be trained in biotechnology. Future plans of the center would include setting up sub-centers in beneficiary countries in south and southeast Asia in addition to expanding its focus on product development, sharing regulatory experiences, and public diplomacy etc. (Source: Financial Express 11/5/04)

NATIONAL BIOTECH POLICY BY JANUARY

Speaking at a press conference, the Union Minister for Science and Technology, Mr. Kapil Sibal, stated that India will finalize a National Biotech Policy by January 2005. Dr. M.K. Bhan, who heads the panel set up by the government to draft the national biotech policy said that the process of inter-ministerial coordination has already started. The panel has set up seven working groups to deal with various aspects of the sector. Dr. Bhan, further said that he personally feels that a 'single window system' for regulation of transgenics is not feasible, but expressed the need for a single regulatory body having its own expertise in different aspects of regulation. (Source: Financial Express, 11/5/04)

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